

BC art. 3; II Peter 1:16-21; I Thes. 2:13; The Written Word of God. I. Not Man's Word II. God's Very Word

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this morning we return to our series in the BC which we began back in May- before brother Garcia began his work with us this summer. In BC art. 2 we saw that God is known- He reveals Himself. So if you know that God is real and revealed, it stands to reason that you will look for the book that He has written. Having come to BC art. 3, this morning we consider the written word of God. When we consider this Word- called the Scriptures or the Bible- it is important to know where it came from and how we received it. Knowing who its author is will directly instruct us concerning its authority. Sola Scriptura- or the Bible alone- was one of the rallying cries of the Reformation. But how do we know if the Bible is trustworthy? Last week, Clara stood here and said- I believe the content of the Old and New Testament to be true. So why do we as a church believe and trust the content of a book? Today we see that Jesus Christ reveals His Word to the church so that we might know and believe the truth.

I. Not Man's Word

In our first point, we will see that the Bible itself- although written by men and for man- is very clearly not bound to the authority of man. When considering the books of the Bible- each book was originally written by a human author. Does our hope, faith and salvation depend upon the ability of man to remember and record? What if one of the apostles forgot something that was necessary for our faith and salvation? Or worse still- what if the letter written are simply the apostolic musing and reflections. Read with me Gal. 1:11-12. Paul makes it abundantly clear- the gospel that he preached was not his own- nor was it built upon the authority of man- rather it was received by special revelation from Jesus Christ. Peter put it this way in our text- II Peter 1:21- no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. To say this another way- the gospel and the recording of prophetic words are not the musing of man- they are not the work and product of a person alone. One of the debates during the Reformation was on the authority of scripture and the church. The RCC taught that the church gives birth to the Word- the Holy Church gives its stamp of approval and identifies which books belong in the canon of Scripture. By putting their position this way- they made it clear that the tradition of the church and the teaching of the Bible have equal authority. If the Church produces the Bible- the church is over the Bible isn't it. But the

church does not produce or authorize the Bible- rather the church simply receives the Bible- the church is produced or is the product of the Bible's presence. Even Robert Schuller said that the Reformation got it wrong- the reformers were too focused on God and not enough on man. But the fact is- man changes his ideas all the time. Oprah tells us to find and speak our own truth. As if we get to determine what is true and what is not. This relativistic fluff has no substance. Let God be true and every man a liar as Rom. 3 says. The Bible is unlike every other book ever written. It was not produced according to the will and desire of man- humans did not determine the content of these holy Scriptures. Even in our history books- man still makes mistakes- we make judgement calls- what to put in and what to leave out. But God authorized and produced this holy book. But what about errors in the church. If the church is the product of the Bible- and the church is built upon the authority of the Bible- why does the church get things wrong? Well- the church can and has wrongly understood and applied God's Word in the past. Some Christians wrongly used the Bible to defend slavery years ago. This is a fault of man and not God! His word does not change. The church may err- but God remains faithful and true- His Word remains unbroken. This calls for humility- let us all be faithful students- refusing to read into the Bible what we think- knowing that our minds are fallen. Rather let us be led by His Spirit and Word into all truth! But it must also be said, although the Bible is not the product of man's work- God was pleased to use men to record His work. We confess organic inspiration. God used the talents, experience and words of the individual authors to record what He- the LORD wanted recorded. That is why Paul read differently than James- while each book retains the flavor of their author God guided them to record exactly what He wanted to be preserved. Thus the Bible remains inerrant and inspired!

II. God's Very Word

Now that it has been clear that the Bible is not sent nor delivered by the will of men, in our second point we see how God did move these men as He carried them along by the Holy Spirit. At issue is this- what makes the Bible- the Holy Scriptures- unique? The Bible is what they call the Vox Deo- the voice of God! Not only is Scripture a faithful testimony of what is true- being historically accurate. It is actually the voice of our living God! Recording not only what God has said- but what He is saying to us today! It is not a word only about God- a theological

treatise- but the very voice of our God! Listen again to I Thes. 2:13- we are thankful that you received the word of God rightly- you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it really is, the word of God. This speaks to the authority of this word. Whatever the Bible stays is to be believed- because God remains trustworthy and true. Concerning creation and marriage and whatever else the Bible speaks to- these truths are not open for debate. This applies to our daily living in light of this truth. Whatever subject the Bible speaks to- it speaks with authority. Not only must these words be believed, they must be submitted to as well. We could rightly ask- will you obey God or man? It is God's Word alone that can teach us the way of truth and holy living. No other source is 100% reliable, and none proves that God's word is true- except the very God who wrote it. Let's press this a little further- the Bible alone is the place where you will read how man can be saved from His sins. Note that our article says- because of a special care for us and our salvation. God wants us to know how we can be saved! Only in Scripture do we find out who the Savior of lost man is. It is neither wise or safe to doubt this truth! But since God's Word is true- you can both know who Jesus is and by trusting in Him find life! If God says- repent and believe and you will be saved- then trusting those words means that you believe God is faithful to His promises! The only reliable way to know God is if God tells you about Himself. The Bible is self-authoritative- speaking and proving within itself that its authority is the authority of God. To be clear, the Bible does not contain God's Word- but rather it is the very word of our God. He alone has the right and the power to record and hand down what should be included. And as such, since it is His Word and not mans, we are not free to add to it. As Dt. 4:2 says- you shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it. And again in Rev. 22:18- if anyone takes away from the words of this book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. So you take away or add to these words of God at your own peril. How did God manage to work though men- and yet ensure the validity and truth- even authority of what was written? Here we consider our reading from II Peter 1:21. No prophecy was ever produced by the words of man as we saw in our first point, but rather men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So men spoke from- on behalf and on the authority of God. They were able to do this because the Holy Spirit carried them- blew within them- inspired them to write exactly what God wanted them to write. The apostles were Spirit directed- carried like ships

on the sea to their harbor- to ensure that this book remains God's Word. As an aside, we must remember that every book and every letter remains God's Word. Not just the red letters- not just the word recorded that Jesus spoke during His earthly ministry- but every letter of every book. Not one jot or tittle will fall- not one word will return to God void. No, as we all remember from II Tim. 3:16- all Scripture is God breathed- inspired by God- breathed out by God- Holy Spirit illuminated. When the original letters and writings were written- known as the autographa- the Spirit ensured that God's Word remained pure. And on through the generation, the Spirit continues to preserve the faithful witness and solid foundation for the church. The Spirit both inspired and continues to keep God's word pure. Thus all Scripture remains true, faithful and trustworthy. How do we know which books should be in our Bible? The early church had to debate- how do we know which books are supposed to be a part of the Bible? As I said before, the church did not make them or authorize them to be inspired- but the church did need to recognize and identify which ones were truly Scripture. Some would have you believe that the church made a baseless judgement call. That the early saints just picked the ones they liked. Other would have us use some external standard- like they were written by the apostles or they have been read in the churches for many years. But these standards ultimately fail. At the end of the day, the only standard that remains- the reason that we accept these books as God's Word is because -as BC art. 5 will state- the Holy Spirit testified in our heart that they are from God- and because they prove themselves to be from God. This internal proof and fulfillment of prophecy is what we will consider next week. So the early church simply received and recognized what is true- these 66 books are the voice of God to His people. We receive them by faith- and the Holy Spirit enables us to acknowledge the voice of our Good Shepherd. We can have good confidence in this Word- knowing that it will endure and stand the test of time. For as Isaiah 40 puts it- the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of the LORD endures forever.

To conclude, it is the job of the church to receive and believe God's Word. We call these holy and divine Scriptures because that is what they are- God's Word. Jesus Christ reveals His Word to the church so that we might know and believe the truth. As Prov. 30 says, Every Word of God proves true; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His word, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar.